

Sunday, Nov. 18: Hymn Sing. Thanksgiving Sunday. Church Conference Sunday.

Message #3: "Let's Eat Together"

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10 (Story of Zacchaeus)

Memory Verse: "Jesus said to him, 'Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham.'" -Luke 19:9

Blurb: We didn't finish last Sunday about conversations around homosexuality. So, we will have "Part 2" this Sunday. We did establish that Christians have very different views, and that it is something that may not have a satisfactory resolution. How, then, do we find a way forward together? This Sunday we'll explore what we can do, and the paths facing the United Methodist Church ahead.

Theme: Jesus didn't condemn, judge, tell him he was wrong. Ate with him! Important to stay convicted in your beliefs. Stay committed, but communicate. Don't condemn, but say they're wrong. Then, love them as you do. Like them. Choose them. Wear them down with kindness. Accept them, but don't accept their wrong teaching or belief. Acknowledge that they are beloved children of God. If they love Jesus, then they are "in." They are true believers! Thanksgiving: Give God thanks with THEM at the table! Sit down with them. Invite them. Include, accept them, love them, value them, put your arm around them.

Opening Song: Hymn Sing (Andrew & Tracy)

Welcome: -Pastor David

-Kids will be invited to go with Pastor Andrew during the message time today for a message appropriate to their level.

Memory Verse: "Jesus said to him, 'Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham.'" -Luke 19:9

Worship Music Set: - Sanctify

King of Glory

The Way

Many Gifts, One Spirit

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Grow Moment: Stewardship - Teresa Gruber

Offering: *The Things that Bring Peace* -Sanctify

Thanksgiving Prayers: -David

Skit: Stress in the Family 2

Message Bumper

Invite the Kids to Lesson: Kids are invited to go with Andrew to tackle how to love with our words.

PP#1: Difficult Conversations: How to LOVE someone when you don't agree.

Let's Eat Together

"Jesus said to him, 'Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham.'" -Luke 19:9

Difficult Conversations: How to LOVE someone when you don't agree. Let's Eat Together. Luke 19:9 "Jesus said to him, 'Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham.'"

PP#2: *Image of a traditional Thanksgiving feast*

Most of us, I would imagine, in some way, are planning on celebrating the annual harvest, and the blessings we all receive, by engaging in sanctioned gluttony. I'm not sure I track the reasoning here: We've had a great harvest, and we have ample supplies...so, let's gorge ourselves to consume half of it before winter sets in!

No, I get it: We stop to be thankful for how we have all we need, and most of what we want. And we celebrate this by gathering with family and friends, and we feast together, to mark how we are so richly blessed.

Meal time—eating together, being together, sharing together, talking—feeds our bodies, our social need for relationships, and our spiritual need for community. There is something about eating together that brings out the best in us, helps us let down our guard, encourages us to try to connect, and to show kindness to one another. There is something holy about a banquet, so much so that Jesus uses it as an image for heaven. [Matt. 22] Actually, it's all over the Bible. [Isaiah 25:6, Rev. 19:9]

"Come, let's eat together." Jesus says this to each of us. [Rev. 3:20] This is the language of forgiveness, of restoration, of value, of acceptance, of getting along, of love-respect.

This is also a biblical model for us to extend to those God has placed in our lives. On Thanksgiving we gather with loved ones, with friends, and eat together. We may not get along perfectly all the time, but we agree to eat together, because we agree each other is worth it. At least, when relationships aren't painfully broken. Then we avoid certain people. The table is a place a pain, when certain people aren't included, or when we refuse to attend because so-and-so might be there.

This Thanksgiving, I want to encourage you, to push you, to eat together. Don't back out because of something someone has done. Don't not invite someone because you have such great differences. We're doing this message series all this month on purpose. We need to learn to get along, to be with others, when we don't agree.

PP#3: Love-Respect looks like:

- Welcome them; receive them warmly
- It's okay to think differently, if you both are trying to please God
- Don't look down on them; treat them with respect
- Be generous when you differ about nonessentials
- Consider what they need to see God's love from you
- Preserve the relationship first
- Don't correct when you want to (beware selfish need to be right)

As Jesus-followers, we are called to love others, even those with whom we disagree. And that love looks like respect. Last Sunday we learned from Romans 14 that love-respect means welcoming warmly others who think differently. It's choosing to receive them in love. It's allowing room when you both are trying to love God. You can even consider them full-out wrong. But even then, it's not looking down on them for their different stance. Stretch to allow room for what is different, if it is not a core Christian belief. As you relate to them, don't think so much about how they are wrong and how to correct them, instead think about what they need from you so that they can see God's love in you. Even when you are right, if you correct them too harshly, you will damage your relationship. You will sacrifice your future influence on them for one point right now. And never correct when you want to. Beware your selfish need to be right. Only correct when the Holy Spirit compels you out of love.

All of this, I remind you, is far easier when you eat together. So, church, eat together, especially when you don't agree.

PP#4: How to LOVE when you disagree...about homosexuality

It's time to get real. One of the ways we really don't agree is on human sexuality, especially homosexuality. So, today, our question is, how to love, when you don't agree on homosexuality.

I'm going to disappoint you, I know, because I'm not going to talk about the rightness or wrongness of homosexuality. This message is not about telling you what the right beliefs are about homosexuality, and then telling you that you must believe them, and that you should go and correct others who don't think this way. But Romans 14, if you remember, tells us that this is not eating well together. Paul tells us to drop our contentious beliefs and just eat together!

So, this message is about what it looks like to love others when we disagree about homosexuality. I'm going to take Paul's position from Romans 14, and even go so far as to tell you that, as Jesus-followers, who have been thinking about this, praying about this, and seeking God's guidance on this, that whatever your beliefs are, you can begin by considering yourself right. Given that, then, what does it look like when you disagree about homosexuality, even when we know we're right and that they're wrong. It looks like eating together.

I want to show you how Jesus did exactly this. Well, it's not a story about Jesus and homosexuals, but it's still a direct fit. It's the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus.

PP#5: *Traditional image of Zacchaeus in a tree and Jesus talking to him.*

Turn in your Bibles to Luke 19. Now, my guess is that many of you have heard this story. Well, let's go look at it a bit closer. The key figure, opposite Jesus, is a man by the name of Zacchaeus. Now, we know two things about Zacchaeus. One is that he was very short, And that becomes important half way through the story. But the other major thing about Zacchaeus is that he was a tax collector.

I need to give you a bit of background to help you frame this better. When the Romans occupied Israel, they, of course, taxed the people. And the Romans were wise and normally didn't demand too-heavy taxes. But the Israelites had a particular hatred for the occupying Romans, because they weren't God-followers, and paying taxes to Rome meant supporting the godless occupiers. Now, Rome also used a clever idea to collect the taxes. They would declare certain *local people* as tax collectors, and make them go and collect the taxes among their own people. But they also enforced the collection with their soldiers that were always stationed around. Pay up, or else!

Now, here's the cleaver part. They demanded a certain amount from the tax collector for each person in his area, but they never told the common person what that amount was. Tax collectors were expected to ask for more than the set tax as their fee and salary. What happened is that the tax collector could charge any amount for taxes he wanted. Whatever he collected above the set amount, he got to keep. So, guess what. Most tax collectors became suspiciously wealthy!

As you might expect, tax collectors were not well liked. Not only did they work for the enemy, they also gouged their fellow Israelites and got rich—pun intended—at their expense! In fact, in ancient Israel, the word “tax collector” was sometimes used in place of the word “sinner.”

So, this story is about someone you don't like. It's about someone you disagree with. Jesus shows us, by example, how to love someone we think is flat wrong. What does that look like?

PP#6: Luke 19:1-10 (CEB) Story of Zacchaeus

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. 2 A man there named Zacchaeus, a ruler among tax collectors, was rich. 3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but, being a short man, he couldn't because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. 5 When Jesus came to that spot, He looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay in your home today.” 6 So Zacchaeus came down at once, happy to welcome Jesus.

Luke, 19, starting with verse 1: “Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. A man there named Zacchaeus, a ruler among tax collectors, was rich.” Okay, so he was a chief tax collector, one who was high up in his office. And, it says, he was rich. But you have to say it with disdain, shaking your head. “He was r-i-c-h, ug.” Now, evidently he had heard about Jesus—this was after Jesus had become quite well known. He didn't need healing from Jesus, at least not physically, like so many others who came to Jesus. But something drew him to Jesus. We don't know what. Verse 3, “He was trying to see who Jesus was, but, being a short man, he couldn't because of the crowd.” He was short, and couldn't see over the crowd. He was small, so couldn't fight through the crowd, also probably because the people weren't too eager to make room for him, right? “So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus, who was about to pass that way.” Sycamore tree trunks often split into multiples close to the ground, so can be easier trees to climb. All right, stage is set. Now we need to listen for how we love others. “When Jesus came to that spot, He looked up and said, ‘Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay in your home today.’ So Zacchaeus came down at once, happy to welcome Jesus.

So, what do we see Jesus do? He notices Zacchaeus. Normally, people would simply look away and keep going. But Jesus stops, turns to him, and talks to him. He treats him like a friend. Church, you really need to stretch to imagine just how crazy this was. Nobody did this.

But then, Jesus enacts the hospitality custom and chooses to go to Zacchaeus' home and eating with him. Nobody did this! Zacchaeus only ever had other tax collectors or Romans in his home. No one else would go in there. No one would go be with him.

PP#7: Luke 19:1-10 (CEB) Story of Zacchaeus

7 Everyone who saw this grumbled, saying, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

8 Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much.”

9 Jesus said to him, “Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham. 10 The Human One came to seek and save the lost.”

Listen to the crowd. Verse 7, “Everyone who saw this grumbled, saying, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’” What? Can you believe it? And this is then used against Jesus as proof for why He cannot be a man of God. Godly people don’t go and associate with people like this. And at Jesus’ trial, His accusers bring up this very thing.

Well, let’s take a look at Zacchaeus. Verse 8, “Zacchaeus stopped [and here this means during the meal time together in his home] and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much.’”

“Jesus said to him, ‘Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham. The Human One came to seek and save the lost.’”

Talk about a change of heart! As they were eating together, Zacchaeus shows his changed heart. His greed is surrendered. He will give away much of his wealth, and also pay back his unfair charges, plus penalties.

I find it interesting that Zacchaeus never says he’ll stop being a tax collector. And Jesus never brings up. But we expect that Zacchaeus was now going to be a fair tax collector.

What does love look like? Jesus ate with Zacchaeus. Why? Because Jesus saw him as still a child of Abraham, one of the family. Jesus treated him like no one else would. Yes, Jesus and he had many disagreements, for sure. But Jesus retained his identity as part of the family.

PP#8: *Image of an extended family eating together.*

As we talk about how this can teach us about homosexuality, I feel I need to be honest with you. I need to disclose my own perspective. Today’s message is not about what I think, or if I’m right. But I need to tell you anyway, just so I’m fair to you.

I believe that homosexuality is incompatible with the Christian lifestyle. I’ve done the reading—the Bible and contemporary science—I’ve prayed it through, I’ve listened to people on all sides. But for me, people who tell me that homosexuality is fine and acceptable, I think they are wrong. So, as I wrestle with this message—you do know that pastors preach their sermons first and foremost to themselves, don’t you?—I think about how I behave as I love people who think homosexuality is okay.

Now, if it is about love, it must never be just about the issue. We must always make it about people. And most of us have to, don’t we? We either question our own sexual orientation, or we have people close to us who do.

For me it was my cousin. I’ve known her since we were young, and we are very close. My wife also fell in love with her quickly, and she became the sister my wife never had. We shared much together, and I tried to help her walk through her devastating divorce as her marriage fell apart.

Well, about five years ago she came to me to tell me that her special friend was actually a “*special* friend,” and that she wanted this woman to be her life partner. They had decided to get married.

Now, my cousin knew my position, and so she was cautious and hesitant to tell me all this. She said that she knew I believed it was wrong, but that she believed it was good and right for her.

I must be honest, on the inside I was screaming, “NOOOO!” But I finally managed to pray for God to help me, and amazingly, the Holy Spirit took over. I told her I loved her, and that nothing would ever change that. I listened to her story, and I measured my words. That day, I told her, “You know, I think you’re wrong. But I will love you no matter what. And if ever you want to hear why I think this is not God’s plan, I promise to talk to you about it respectfully.”

The next part came when I received her marriage invitation. I lost a lot of sleep. Reese and I talked for hours. We sought out the advice of other pastors, with different perspectives. We prayed and prayed. Finally, I pulled a Jesus. I invited myself over to their home for a meal (they were already living together). As we ate, I told them that although I realize this was very important to them, and that I love them, and I want to support them in all good ways, I could not attend their union, because for me, it would be celebrating something I think was wrong for them. I didn't want to offend them, but I just couldn't celebrate it. I support them, but not their union.

Now, they were very gracious, and they thanked me for my honesty and integrity. They said that although they understood, they disagreed with me. We then ate our meal together with much other conversation, and we played cards late into the night.

The next difficult conversation came when they came to visit us two years ago, and stayed with us in our home. How do we handle sleeping arrangements?

By the way, I have people in my family who are mad at me for still treating them like family.

Well, I want you to know that difficult conversations are never just about the issue. It's about people, and relationships. It's about loving others when you disagree. What does that look like?

PP#9: How to LOVE when you disagree...about homosexuality

1. It's about the relationship
2. Affirm they are an authentic lover of Jesus
3. Choose to love, first and foremost
4. Accept we may have different beliefs
5. I share authentically my beliefs
6. I listen respectfully to their beliefs
7. I share lovingly how I think they're wrong
8. But I don't let that corrupt our relationship

So, as we talk about what this love looks like, we begin by how Jesus treated Zacchaeus. Jesus affirmed him as part of God's family. This first, critical step, is that when you disagree with other Christians about homosexuality, that you remind yourself that no matter what their beliefs are—no matter how wrong you think they may be—that they are an authentic lover of Jesus. Say to yourself, "Although I think they are wrong, I accept that they are a real and true lover of Jesus, and they are striving to follow Him, too. They don't have to get it all right." As the conversation begins, commit to love them, first and foremost. You may believe that they are wrong about some things, but you also have to admit that you may be wrong about some things, too. Remember that it is not your primary charge from God to correct them and fix them. My primary charge from God is to love them, and show God's love to them. As we talk, this means that I need to be authentically me, and share from my heart. I need to respectfully tell them what I believe, and why. But I must never do it in a way that belittles them or looks down upon them. I may consider them wrong, and in Paul's language, that they have the "weaker" position. But I have a responsibility to those who are weaker, says Paul. One is to listen, not to find errors or to condemn, but to understand. I must strive to preserve our relationship, and stop my selfishness from getting in the way.

To love you and accept you doesn't mean that I have to agree that you are right, or that your beliefs are right. In fact, my love for you may compel me to share how I think you're wrong, because I want what I think is better for you. But I don't let that corrupt our relationship. That means maybe I don't bring it up over and over again, whenever I see you or talk with you. It may mean that I let you and your partner sleep in the same bed in my house. It may also mean, the Bible says, that there

are times I may need to avoid them and separate myself from them. [Romans 16:17, 2 Corinthians 6:17, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, Titus 3:10, 2 John 1:10-11]

PP#10: Homosexuality divides Christians without any clear path of resolution.

Homosexuality, it seems, is exceptionally difficult to discuss, because it strikes at the heart of our Christian beliefs. Those who think it is wrong cannot comprehend how a Jesus-follower would blatantly continue to sin and go against God's plain Word in Scripture. So, it's not so much about homosexuality as it is an issue of Scripture's authority. How do we understand Scripture to tell us God's path for abundant living? Those who think homosexuality is accepted cannot comprehend how Jesus-followers would continue to create barriers to God's grace and acceptance, and continue to enforce obsolete understandings of human sexuality. It's not so much about accepting Scripture's authority as it is about accepting God's unconditional love.

There are authentic Jesus-followers on all sides of this conversation. Our bishop has so aptly said that the struggle for Christians around homosexuality *shows no real possibility of resolution*.

So, what do we do? What is our way forward?

My answer is that we continue to love one another, and be patient in our power and other's weakness. We resolve to pursue Jesus together, and we commit to the correcting of the Holy Spirit.

PP#11: Homosexuality and the United Methodist Church

Now, there are times when we must make declarative statements. And one of those times is how we, as the United Methodist Church, interpret scriptural holiness in the conversation of homosexuality. Let me tell you a bit of what is happening on the global landscape of our United Methodist Church.

Before 1972, homosexuality was not referenced in our church's official guidelines, published in what is called *The United Methodist Book of Discipline*. Then, in 1972, included in this *Book of Discipline* was the declarative statement that "homosexuality is incompatible with the Christian lifestyle." Ever since then, United Methodists have disagreed about this statement. On this stance, the United Methodist Church has never been *united!*

Our global decision making body, called General Conference, meets every four years. There are delegates from every continent, as the United Methodist Church is a world-wide church. Only the General Conference can make changes to our *Book of Discipline*. And every time they've met—they meet every four years—there has been legislation to modify our official stance on homosexuality.

Well, in 2016, there was a motion to delete any reference to homosexuality from *The Book of Discipline*. There would be no official stance by the United Methodist Church on homosexuality. And once again, it looked like the motion was going to be defeated. There was an upwelling threat of schism, that a hefty number of United Methodists would break away because they believed so differently about homosexuality. So, on the floor, they declared a pause, and they asked the bishops to help our church find a way forward that would not lead to schism.

The bishops assembled a team of 32 very diverse United Methodists from all over the globe to meet together and talk about ideas, for two years. They sought ways to have conversation, to listen and to understand, and to propose a way forward. Then, the bishops called a special General Conference to be held in St. Louis in February 2019 to resolve our church's official stance on homosexuality. Their priorities are to preserve the unity of the United Methodist Church, create as

wide of a tent of tolerance as possible, and to best position the church for it's Jesus-witness in the world.

PP#12: The Way Forward

1. Traditionalist Plan: Retain "homosexuality is incompatible with the Christian lifestyle"
2. Connectional Conferences Plan: Create subdivisions of the UMC around homosexuality
3. One Church Plan: Allows each Annual Conference, local church, and pastor to retain their beliefs

So, coming to the General Conference in February are three proposals. One is the Traditionalist Plan, which will in essence leave the official stance the same. The second is the Connectional Conferences plan, which will create different sub-divisions of the United Methodist Church based on different stances on homosexuality. Each local church can decide which connectional conference of the United Methodist Church to be a part of, but all connectional conferences would be under a broader umbrella of the United Methodist Church. The third plan, the one that is recommended by the bishops, is called the One Church Plan. It retains one United Methodist Church, but allows each annual conference, local church, and pastor, to retain their personal beliefs on the issue.

This is going to be a difficult discussion. There is no good resolution. No matter what happens, it will be painful.

But this is the cost of loving those who think differently. We don't think alike. We struggle to find unity. So, as we struggle each in our own lives to love those who think differently, I also call on you to pray for our United Methodist Church. Pray for God's Spirit to lead. Pray for us to reflect His glory in all that we do. Pray for the unity of His church.

PP#13: John Wesley

"The longer I live, the larger allowances I make for human infirmities. I exact more from myself, and less from others. Go thou and do likewise!" -"Letter to Reverend Samuel Furley"
 "Let all these smaller points stand aside. Let them never come into sight. 'If your heart is as my heart,' if you love God and all mankind, I ask no more: 'give me your hand.'" -"A Catholic Spirit"

Perhaps there is guidance from our Methodist DNA to allow wider tolerance for those who think differently, while still remaining firm on core beliefs. Perhaps this can help you as you love those who think so differently in your daily lives. Perhaps this can help us find a way forward as a church. Here are a couple more pieces of Christian wisdom from our founder, John Wesley. He said, "The longer I live, the larger allowances I make for human infirmities. I exact more from myself, and less from others. Go thou and do likewise!" Sounds like love-respect.

One more, "Let all these smaller points stand aside. Let them never come into sight. 'If your heart is as my heart,' if you love God and all mankind, I ask no more: 'give me your hand.'"

If you love God, then that's enough. Then we can be together.

Jesus said, "Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham." Extend him your hand.

Yes, we need to decide what is smaller and what is essential. And love for God compels us to stand firm in our beliefs. But love of others also compels us to seek unity.

This Thanksgiving, I want to encourage you to gather around the table. Make the effort to be gracious and include all those who may think differently about so many different issues. After all, you can all still share how grateful you are to God for so many blessings. Do that together.

This past spring, I again invited myself over to my cousin's home for a meal. As we all sat around the table, I said, "I love you so much, but I still think your marriage is wrong."

My cousin smiled and said, "I know you do. And we love you, too. But we think you're wrong." Then, her wife said, "Let's eat together." And we did.

Amen.

Closing Song: *Only King Forever* - Sanctify

Memory Verse:

"Jesus said to him, 'Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham.'" -Luke 19:9

Announcements: -Pastor David

Snacks in the lobby, from CMMT

Support Youth Group Mission Trip - take an envelope off the back window

Church Conference

Benediction: -Pastor David

"May the God of endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude toward each other, similar to Christ Jesus' attitude. That way you can glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ together with one voice." -Romans 15:5-6